


board games, *Imperium* and *Invasion Earth*, which chronicle the Interstellar Wars (in part) and the final battle of the Solomani Rim War, respectively.

The Solomani Rim is a measurable improvement over *The Spinward Marches*. The sixteen subsector maps are considerably more detailed and provide more information. Facts about starport type and bases, the presence of gas giants and water (for refueling purposes), and large populations are included right in the hex on the map; all the pertinent information about a world is available at a glance. Another very useful item is a large map in the centerfold which shows how the subsectors fit together. Each of the subsector maps is accompanied by a listing of the worlds included and their statistics and a brief word about any planets of note in the region. As for those "familiar" planets, GDW has continued its traditional use of place names from fantasy and science-fiction works as the names for worlds in the *Traveller* universe. I spotted Anacreon, Barsoom, Krypton, and Boskone at first glance.

If your *Traveller* campaign has somehow managed to exhaust the opportunities presented in the Spinward Marches, or a change of venue just sounds like a good idea, *The Solomani Rim* should prove valuable. The supplement, designed by John Harshman, is available for \$3.98 in game and hobby stores. 

Tales stranger than fantasy

MAZES AND MONSTERS

Rona Jaffe
Dell 0-440-15699-8 \$3.50

HOBGOBLIN

John Coyne
Berkley 0-425-05380-6 \$3.50

Presently on the shelves of newsstands and bookstores are these two mundane novels dealing with players of fantasy role-playing games. Although very different in their approaches and effects, these novels have a lot in common.

Above all else, both writers view fantasy gaming as something that must be *explained*, like teenage alcoholism or joining the Moonies. And *examined*: Just what is it, anyway, that leads intelligent, seemingly normal people into fantasy role-playing? In both works, game players are eventually shown suffering from dissociative schizophrenia (or some similar malady), which the reader is invited to blame on fantasy role-playing.

Another important similarity: Both are by established writers (Coyne has published three previous books, Jaffe ten) who clearly have not done much playing of role-playing games, but nonetheless have decided that they would be an interesting subject for a novel.

Coyne's *Hobgoblin* would generally be considered the lesser of the two works, although he seems to have put more research into his work than Ms. Jaffe displays in her book. Coyne tosses about names of games like *Traveller* and the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game with a spurious facility. He presents an "original" monster (a Brobdingnagian from *Gulliver's Travels*) in a format evidently cribbed from the AD&D™ Monster Manual. And he even tries to depict a gaming session, in which polyhedral dice (which he perpetually calls "pyramidal") display bizarre ranges of numerical values. His research shows to much better advantage in the creatures of Irish myth with which the fictitious game "Hobgoblin" is populated: banshees, spriggans, ghillie dhuis, and others even more obscure.

The story concerns high-school student and FRP gamer Scott Gardiner. His mother and he live near Ballycastle, a vast medieval Irish fortress that was transplanted stone by stone to the U.S. decades ago. Scott's father has died (simultaneously with the demise of his 21st level paladin: *heavy* symbolism), and his mother has had to move near Ballycastle, since she is writing its history. Scott must adjust to a number of major changes at once, including going from BMOC at a prep school to freakish newcomer at a rural high school. When he begins to encounter bugganes in the bushes, his mother and friends (and the reader) must decide whether they are dealing with the visions of an overtaxed mind, pranks by vicious classmates, or something . . . else? The answer, of course, must be found by the reader within the book.

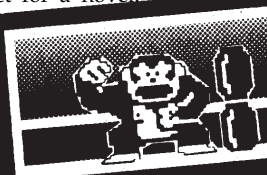
The central characters in Ms. Jaffe's *Mazes and Monsters* are students at a small Ivy League university in eastern Pennsylvania. Kate, Jay Jay, Daniel, and Robbie meet, love, laugh, and play "Mazes and Monsters," until one of them vanishes mysteriously and the less competent media types raise a nationwide hysteria about this ominous and bizarre cult-game. (Does that ring any bells, folks?)

Much of the book is taken up with analyzing why the players are who they are. All of this psychoanalysis, of course, is for the purpose of explaining the deep insecurities, neuroses, or even psychoses that *must* exist within the players of these games. This is a Problem Novel, and the Problem is role-playing games.

Neither of these books is likely to be enlightening to the FRP gamer, except as examples of what reasonably intelligent adult non-players imagine we must be like. In both books, the attainment of mature adulthood is accompanied by the abandonment of role-playing games. Need I say more?

- Reviewed by Mike Lowery

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